



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

August 15, 2006

Ms. Linda McCulloch
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Montana Office of Public Instruction
1227 11th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-2501

Dear Superintendent McCulloch:

To meet the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requirement of having every student on grade level in reading and mathematics by 2014, we must continue working together to ensure that every student has access to a highly qualified, effective teacher.

On May 12, 2006, the U.S. Department of Education requested that your State submit a revised highly qualified teachers (HQT) plan detailing the actions that your agency and the State's local educational agencies will take to ensure that, during the 2006-07 school year and beyond, all teachers of core academic subjects are highly qualified, and that poor and minority children are taught at the same rates as other children by highly qualified and experienced teachers. Similar requests were made to all States because the Department had determined that, although most States have made significant progress over the past four years, none was likely to meet the NCLB requirement of having all classes in core academic subjects taught by a highly qualified teacher by the end of the 2005-06 school year.

Thank you for submitting your revised State HQT plan in early July, as we requested. All the State plans were peer reviewed in late July by panels of readers with expertise in teacher quality and education reform. Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the peer review panel's comments and recommendations for your State.

As you can see, the peer reviewers concluded that your plan had some deficiencies, including but not limited to the lack of plan with specific steps adequate to ensure that poor and minority children are taught at the same rates as other children by highly qualified and experienced teachers, as required by Section 1111(b)(8)(C) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by NCLB. Given the concerns noted in the peer reviewers' assessment, with which we concur, the Department requests that you correct the identified deficiencies so that your plan can be approved. We recognize the substantial challenge it has been for each of the States to prepare this plan, and while we are encouraged that some of the States were able to submit complete and comprehensive plans, we also recognize the other States will need additional time and technical assistance to complete their work in this area.

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Our mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation.

It is necessary for us to be able to conclude that the strategies you have proposed in your revised plan will be sufficient to ensure that your State will reach the goal of having all classes in core academic subjects taught by highly qualified teachers by the end of the 2006-07 school year, and that poor and minority children are taught at the same rates as other children by highly qualified and experienced teachers. To satisfy this requirement, you should do one of the following:

- Your agency can provide data, which the Department will audit for accuracy, confirming that all core academic subject classes are currently being taught by teachers who are highly qualified to teach them, including supporting data showing that poor and minority children are taught by teachers with similar qualifications and experience as other children; **or**
- Your agency can re-submit a revised State plan, including the “equitable distribution plan,” that fully addresses all of the plan’s required components and corrects the deficiencies that the peer reviewers identified.

I must also remind you that the Department is taking this issue quite seriously. As a reminder, the Department has already placed conditions on your ESEA Title I, Part A and ESEA Title II, Part A grants that require your agency to fully implement a subject-matter test for new elementary school teachers. Whichever option your agency chooses, we will need to receive your full response no later than Friday, September 29, 2006. Please submit all materials **electronically** to HQTplans@ed.gov. If, by September 29, your agency has neither provided evidence that it is in full compliance with these NCLB requirements nor successfully addressed the deficiencies in its revised plan for having all teachers highly qualified, the Department may consider other available remedies to secure the State’s compliance. Should your plan be approved, the Department will monitor its implementation.

In the event you decide to strengthen your State plan in a way that can ensure compliance with the NCLB requirements, we are prepared to provide you with any assistance you may require. For instance, we would be pleased to share with you some of the other States’ strategies that the peer reviewers found to be particularly promising. For your information, all of the State plans are available through the Department’s Web site at www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/index.html. We will post the peer reviewer comments on the same page.

If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact Robert Stonehill (202-260-9737, or robert.stonehill@ed.gov), or Libby Witt (202-260-5585, or elizabeth.witt@ed.gov). Thank you for your further attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/

Henry L. Johnson

Enclosure